Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

Region One
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Ref:DV081-03
April 3, 2003

To: Environmental Quality Council, Capitol Building, PO Box 201704, Helena, MT 59620-1704
Dept. of Environmental Quality, Planning, Prevention & Assistance, PO Box 200901, Helena, 59620
Dept. of Environmental Quality, Permitting Compliance, PO Box 200901, Helena, 59620-0901
Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks: Director's Office – Reg Peterson; Fisheries Division – Karen Zackheim; Legal Unit - Brandi Fisher
Montana Historical Society, SHPO, 225 North Roberts, Veteran's Memorial Building, Helena, 59620
Montana State Library, 1515 East Sixth Ave., Helena, 59620-1800
George Ochenski, PO Box 689, Helena, 59624
Wayne Hirst, Montana State Parks Foundation, PO Box 728, Libby, 59923
Montana State Parks Association, PO Box 699, Billings, 59103
Joe Gutkoski, President, Montana River Action Network, 304 N 18th Ave., Bozeman, 59715
Rep. Verdell Jackson, 555 Wagner lane, Kalispell, 59901-8079
Sen. Bob DePratu, PO Box 1217, Whitefish, 59937-1217
Jim Jensen, Montana Environmental Information Center, PO Box 1184, Helena, 59624
Flathead County Commissioners, 800 S Main Street, Kalispell, 59901
Rick Hanners, Hungry Horse News, PO Box 189, Columbia Falls 59912
Flathead Valley Trout Unlimited, PO Box 638, Kalispell, 59903
The Ecology Center, Inc., 801 Sherwood Street, Suite B, Missoula, 59802
Joe Huston, 18 Yellowstone Street, Kalispell, 59901

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Fish, Wildlife & Parks, Region One, has completed an environmental assessment (EA) for the Gooderich Bayou Fish Barrier Project. The project involves replacement of a culvert and installation of a fish barrier to prevent rainbow trout from traveling upstream to spawn at the bridge site.

Comments received supported the proposed action. A copy of the decision document is enclosed. Please direct any questions or comments to Grant Grisak, FWP Fisheries Biologist, 490 North Meridian Road, Kalispell, MT 59901, (406) 751-4541 or e-mail to ggrisak@state.mt.us.

Sincerely,

Daniel P. Vincent
Regional Supervisor

Flathead Misc

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Enclosure

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT AND DECISION NOTICE
for the
GOODERICH BAYOU FISH BARRIER
March 31, 2003

Project proposal:

The proposed action is to replace a culvert that runs under the Capistrano Drive crossing at Gooderich Bayou. The culvert would be installed in such a manner as to create a fish barrier to disrupt the movement of rainbow trout through this site and ultimately reduce rainbow trout spawning opportunities. Rainbow trout produced at this site enter the Flathead River system and provide an opportunity for hybridization with westslope cutthroat trout. Disrupting the spawning success of these rainbow trout would reduce the potential for hybridization with westslope cutthroat trout.

The barrier design that is proposed involves replacing the main culvert with a new box culvert, but it would be installed at a higher elevation in the road grade. This would impound water on the upstream side and create a gradient differential of approximately 4 feet on the downstream side. The splash area of the outlet would be armored with rock to prevent rainbow trout from entering the pipe during normal rainbow trout spawning times.

Site location and characteristics:

Gooderich Bayou is located in Flathead County approximately 6.5 miles northeast of the town of Kalispell. The legal description of the site is T29N, R23W, S21. The bayou is a side channel of the Flathead River, and it receives perennial water flow from springs and other ground water sources. During high spring flows the Flathead River backs up into the bayou, and at times the river is connected at the upper reach of the bayou. The Capistrano Drive crossing is owned by three landowners.

Project justification:

During a routine survey in 1997, Montana Fish Wildlife & Parks (MFWP) biologists discovered that rainbow trout were spawning in Gooderich Bayou. In 2001, a spawning trap was installed at the upstream end of a culvert at the Capistrano Drive crossing. From February to June, MFWP sampled 254 fish representing eight species. Forty-four of these were rainbow trout. In addition, 22 spawning redds were counted at sites upstream and immediately downstream of the trap site. In 2002 the trap was installed again to measure use by spawning rainbows, and 177 fish representing six species were sampled. Twenty-two of these fish were rainbow trout. In addition, 17 spawning redds were enumerated at sites above and immediately below the trap site. Based on empirical recruitment estimates, it is believed that Gooderich Bayou can produce enough rainbow trout to recruit approximately 2,500 of them to the Flathead River population annually.

During the trapping operation, MFWP discovered that the main culvert under the Capistrano Drive crossing is collapsing near the middle. A gap of several inches is present, and road material can be removed from the gap. During spring runoff, increased ground water flow and water backing up from the Flathead River cause this pipe to become completely inundated. During this time the increased water is conveyed through two overflow pipes that are set at a higher elevation in the dike. It is believed that continued inundation of the primary culvert during spring runoff will facilitate erosion resulting in catastrophic failure of the culvert and ultimately wash out the dike.

In an effort to control the number of rainbow trout in the Flathead River and reduce hybridization opportunities between rainbow and westslope cutthroat trout, MFWP proposes to replace this culvert and install a fish barrier to prevent rainbow trout from using it as a spawning site.

Environmental impacts of project:

No adverse effects are expected for plants, amphibians, reptiles, birds, wild mammals, or humans. Bald eagles may use the site periodically, but this is believed to be very limited. This project is designed to intentionally disrupt spawning migrations of rainbow trout during low flow in the springtime of the year. Other nongame fish species like suckers and peamouth would have unrestricted access during high flow, which typically coincides with their spawning periods. Other game species like mountain whitefish would likely be restricted during fall migration, but few have ever been observed at the site, and this species does not typically spawn in Gooderich Bayou.

Implementing this project would cause the water level upstream of the Capistrano Drive crossing to be increased by up to 4 feet. Discussions with landowners likely to be affected indicate this is an acceptable outcome.

Social impacts:

Rainbow trout that spawn in Gooderich Bayou are sought by some anglers during the times that they are present. Young fish that are produced in the bayou move to the Flathead River, and some ultimately provide recreational angling for the public. Disrupting rainbow trout production would likely have a limited impact on anglers using the bayou for angling. Likewise the number of rainbow trout entering the Flathead River would be reduced, which could reduce the number available to anglers. This would be mitigated by stocking the bayou with westslope cutthroat trout. Stocking would be discontinued if it did not maintain or improve angling.

Only short-term impacts would be realized during the construction period when area residents would need to gain access to and from the site through neighboring private property. This time frame is expected to last between 2 and 4 days.

As indicated before, increased water levels will result from this project. Area landowners have indicated this is an acceptable outcome and in some cases is desirable in improving recreational opportunity.

Public involvement:

In compliance with the Montana Environmental Policy Act, a draft environmental assessment (EA) was prepared and circulated for public comment from February 7 through March 9, 2003. The draft EA was mailed to 13 agencies, organizations, and interested persons. An additional 4 copies were requested by individuals and organizations. A notice was advertised in the local newspaper, MFWP website, and copies were made available at local libraries and MFWP Region One administrative headquarters in Kalispell.

A single comment was received in support of the project. The commenter pointed out that the draft EA referred to mountain whitefish as a nongame species and requested that MFWP identify what type of fish barrier would be installed. As pointed out in the project proposal section and project justification sections of this decision notice, these two issues have been corrected and/or more adequately described.

Throughout the comment period, MFWP met with area landowners to discuss issues associated with this project. These included fishery impacts and mitigation proposals, land ownership, upgrading overflow pipes during construction, and several minor comments dealing with beavers, maintenance, etc.

On March 31, 2003, MFWP met with the Capistrano Drive Road Maintenance Association and presented a synopsis of the project. Comments were sought and the general consensus was that the proposed action should proceed.

Decision notice:

Comments received during the public scoping period, both written and oral, unanimously supported the proposed action. There were no comments received that indicated MFWP did not consider other viable alternatives or did not consider impacts other than those listed in the draft EA. Based on this, I recommend that the proposed action be implemented as stated in the draft EA. The barrier will be installed using the aforementioned design, and reasonable modifications may be incorporated to the design if the preconstruction survey reveals this is warranted. The spawning gravel at the downstream side of the existing pipe will be removed during the construction. In concert with implementing the proposed action, MFWP will also implement Alternative 2, as listed in the draft EA, for a limited period of time. This will involve trapping of rainbow trout and moving them to Dry Bridge Pond for use by Kalispell-area youth. This trapping effort will continue until the rainbow population has been suppressed and is expected to last for approximately 3 spawning seasons after the barrier is in place. Eggs in spawning redds will also be destroyed by walking on them and by electrofishing. To mitigate for lost fishing opportunity in the bayou, MFWP will stock it with 250 westslope cutthroat trout annually. If this stocking effort shows little success in maintaining or improving the fishery, it will be discontinued. Success of stocking will be measured by electrofishing surveys and/or angler satisfaction. Because stocked fish will have the opportunity to move downstream into the Flathead River during high water, it is possible that some of the stocked fish will evacuate the bayou. Implementing this project will serve the objective of reducing opportunity for hybridization between rainbow trout and westslope cutthroat trout.

Dan Vincent, Region One Supervisor
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

Date 3/3/03